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Preliminary Historic Resources Study
of Eastern Santa Cruz Island

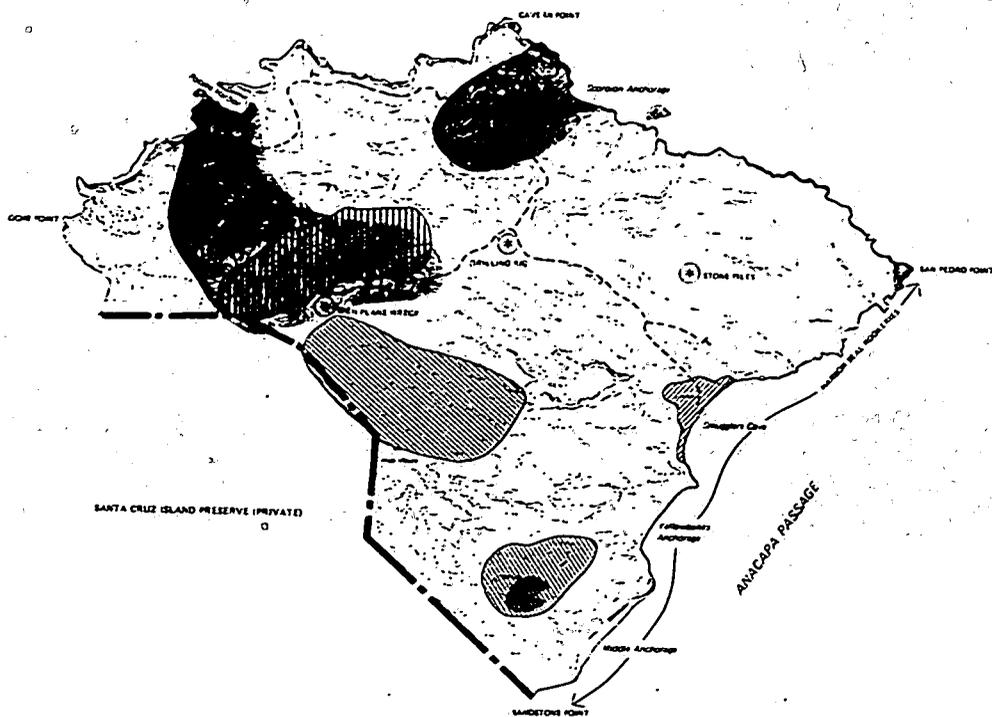
Bruce Craig
Channel Islands National Park
December 1983

Introduction

Santa Cruz, the largest of the Channel Islands lies about 20 miles off the southern California coast. It is 24.6 miles long and up to 8 miles wide and encompasses nearly 100 square miles. The island is now divided into two pieces of property---the Gherini sheep ranch on the eastern tip (about 6,700 acres) and the Santa Cruz Island Company Cattle Ranch (also known as the Stanton Ranch (about 50,000 acres). These two properties are joined by rough trails which climb from the plateau on the Gherini property over the rugged dividing mountains and then down to the central valley where the Santa Cruz Island Company Ranch headquarters is located.

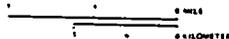
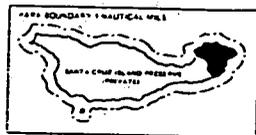
The rugged, almost vertical coast line of the Ghereini property is broken at two locations by debouching canyons which drain the major watersheds of the property. These occur at Smugglers Cove and Scorpion Anchorage. The two parts are connected by a plateau which rises sharply from the two canyons and the sea. It gently ascends some distance back to the foot of the mountains which serves as a shelter from southwesterly winds that blow from the open sea. Here there is a dramatic view, a pastoral plateau which affords a commanding view of the sea and the two ranch complexes.1

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 96-199 the Gherini property will eventually be purchased and opened for visitor use as part of the Channel Islands National Park. Although the island remains privately owned, the National Park Service has been directed by Congress to develop a General Management Plan for such time as the Federal ownership. To this end, this report briefly chronicles the history of the Gherini property and documents the condition of structures of historic significance on this property. It is hoped that this brief report will be used in conjunction with Michael A. Glassow's The Status of Archaeological Research on Eastern Santa Cruz Island, California, so as to facilitate the preparation of a Land Acquisition Plan, General Management Plan and eventually cultural resources management plan.2



AREAS INDICATED MAY CONTAIN MORE THAN ONE SIGNIFICANT RESOURCE. NATIVE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES ARE GENERALLY CONFINED TO SMALL OR RUGGED HABITATS. PLACES SUSCEPTIBLE TO SHEEP ALL ROCKY HORIZONTAL AREAS ARE CONSIDERED SENSITIVE HABITAT. CLASSIFICATIONS ARE LOW BASED ON WORKING RESOURCES AS WELL AS PHOTO AND LIMITED AIR FIELD SURVEYS IN APRIL 1983.

-  PRINCIPALLY GRAZELAND - SEVERE IMPACT FROM GRAZING
-  MAJOR SPERMWOOD GROUNDS - LITTLE OR NO REPRODUCTION LIMITED UNDERSTORY
-  SIGNIFICANT ASSEMBLAGES OF PLANTS - SEVERE IMPACT FROM GRAZING LIMITED UNDERSTORY AND LITTLE OR NO REPRODUCTION
-  SENSITIVE HABITAT IDENTIFIED BY OTHERS - LISTED SPECIES ARE OR TO HAVE LIMITED DISTRIBUTION ADDITIONAL FIELD STUDIES REQUIRED
-  SIGNIFICANT HISTORIC RESOURCE OR SETTING
-  HISTORIC SITE
-  SEALED ROCK PILE
-  MAIN FOUR WHEEL DRIVE ROAD
-  TRAIL



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RESOURCE SENSITIVITY EAST SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Historical Overview

Despite extensive archeological investigations still relatively little is known about the prehistory of Santa Cruz Island. Even though there has never been a modern systematic survey of the entire island, archeologists believe that at one time, perhaps as many as 1450 individuals occupied 11 or 12 aboriginal villages around Santa Cruz Island's coastline. The eastern part of the island contained three such Chumash villages---lu'ups, (north coast or western edge of Chinese Harbor) Swaxil (Scorpion Anchorage) and Nanawani (Smugglers Cove). Archeologists believe that Swaxil was probably the largest village on the island---containing 150-200 persons.³

The native Chumash left the island circa 1815 having been ravaged by European diseases and later by Russian whalers. Since then the island has been occupied by fishermen and by ranchers some of who still reside there.

Mexico is reputed to have attempted to turn the island into a penal colony, an endeavor that legend records failed to succeed. In 1839 the island was granted to Spaniard Andres Castellero who sold it to a British trading company, Barron and Forbes. Spanish sheep, horses, mules and cattle were introduced. Ranch activities centered in the long valley. The island was offered for sale in 1858 and sold in 1869 to Justinian Caire and a group of San Francisco investors. Eventually Caire acquired all the stock in the "Santa Cruz Island Company". A French style house with barns, a winery, and workers quarters were constructed in the central valley and Prisoners Harbor. Stone walls, fences and roads extended through the central valley over the hills to secondary headquarters at Smugglers Cove and Scorpion Anchorage. A good many of these buildings still stand and constitute the most important historical structures remaining on the eastern portion of the island.

Caire died in 1897; most of the island was sold in 1937 to Edwin L. Stanton, a Los Angeles businessman. But, about 6,700 acres were retained by the Gherini branch of the family (Mrs. Ambrose Gherini was a granddaughter of Justinian Caire). This property still remains in the Gherini family.

In addition to the ranch structures, fisherman shacks littered the island coastline in the early 1900's. One of these was located on a bluff overlooking Scorpion Anchorage; others were at Chinese Harbor, Potatoe Harbor, Blue Banks and Hungrymans Gulch as well as Smugglers Cove. Margaret H. Eaton in her Diary of a Sea Captain's Wife highlights the events of her life, much of which was spent residing in the various shacks around the island.⁴ A cursory field search revealed that none of the shacks mentioned by Eaton still stand. The sites of these camps, however, would be important sources of information regarding the various ethnic groups (Chinese, Japanese, Portugese, and Anglos are known to have resided in these camps) who lived and worked on the island. According to Glassow, "From an archeological standpoint, all structures, standing or not, may be associated with trash deposits and other types of discard areas. These would be important sources of information regarding the history of the ranching operation and of the people involved⁵."

The Structures

Although the archeological sites, trash deposits and other discard areas may be of archeological interest, not all such structures or areas are historically significant. The structures associated with the Santa Cruz Island Company and possibly earlier ranch structures (original or modified) still stand and are of historical importance. But there also are a number of more recent structures which are of little, if any, historical significance. This is especially true of the sheep ranch structures at Scorpion Bay.

The Scorpion Bay ranch complex today serves as the headquarters for the Gherini Sheep Ranch operation. The beach is strewn with debris of at least two ships which have been stripped and salvaged by the ranchers (photographs #1 and 2). To the north side of the beach there is evidence of a dock, the remains of which are battered by surf and storms (photograph #3).

Above the beach there is a knoll upon which the Eaton Shack once rested. There is no evidence of a shack, but there is a marked depression which has a heavy overgrowth of anise. A road apparently one ran down to the dock. The area also is littered with shell and midden material: Glassow identifies the area as Santa Cruz Island site #141. Evidently the knoll contains cultural remains from both historic and prehistoric time periods (photograph # 4 and 5).

Moving up the road toward the ranch complex, there is a grove of cypress trees (photograph 6). The trees, though introduced by man, help establish the historic scene and should be preserved. The setting in this area is beautiful. As one looks at the cave that once served as a powder magazine one starts to get a sense of the historic ranch complex.

The cave shelter is walled in with bricks and rocks that have been cemented together. The magazine is about 11 feet deep, 12 feet wide and approximately 6 feet high. Inside there is a heavy soot on the roof and evidence of bottles and shell debris certainly of historic and possibly of prehistoric significance (a table and furnishings in the cave are modern). The cave structure is an example of the structural adaptations to serve needs of residents in the 19th and 20th centuries (photographs #7-10).

Moving up the road, cypress trees appear to be neatly planted in rows and most likely date back to the Caire era (photograph #11). There is an old tool shack with a shingle roof, constructed of planks (with square nails) measuring about 6 feet by 12 feet. The ranch foreman Pete Peterson can not remember when the shack was constructed; he believes it an old sheep shack. Today it is used as a storage shack for tools and old bed mattresses (photographs 12-16).

Behind the tool shack is the old "cheese cave" (later wine was stored there) referred to by Margaret Eaton on page 152 of the Diary of a Sea Captain's Wife. It is about 12 feet high and roughly 18 feet square. This cave is the largest found in the ranch complex and is associated with the prehistoric and historic eras. It too has a black midden floor and soot covered walls (photographs 17-18). Close by the cheese cave is an outhouse which appears to be of modern construction (see photograph 19).

Moving on up the road is the main adobe ranch house (photographs 21-24). The structure is two stories high; there is no internal stairwell; one ascends to the second floor on a staircase behind the adobe structure (photographs 25-26). The walls of the ranchhouse are about three feet thick and remain intact; the structure appears sound. The interior has been divided into three rooms. The doorway leads into a kitchen which has a wood burning stove, and modern refrigerator. The floor is linoleum although the room to the right of the kitchen has a stone floor. The kitchen measures about 15 feet wide by 16 feet deep.

A doorway leads directly to a room to the right of the kitchen. This room is slightly larger (20 feet wide by 15 feet deep); the north wall has open shelving. The hardware on the east door appears original as does the stone floor (photograph 30).

To the left of the kitchen is the old bake oven which measures about 12 feet wide by 15 feet deep. It extends up to the second floor. The room is used for storage today (photographs 29-32).

The second floor of the main ranch house is used as a ranch hand residence. There is one long bedroom, 18 feet long by 15 feet wide. On the west wall a door opens into a separate storage room. These second floor rooms have wood plank floor boards and original hardware on the doors. Most likely the roof was raised at one time (photographs 33-37).

Directly across from the adobe structure is the old Santa Cruz Island Company bunkhouse. (According to Pete Peterson, all the old ranch buildings can be recognized as they all have green trim around the doorways and windows.) This structure is in a remarkable state of preservation. The exterior is well maintained and seems to have its original hardware. Inside, are plank floorboards and furnishings which may be original to the house. The structure is divided into about ten rooms, all of which are furnished (photographs 38-39).

Up the valley are some additional shed structures that may date back to the Santa Cruz Island Company era. One shed is attached to the adobe structure and is a shingle roofed storage shed covered with metal siding (photograph #40). Most of the other buildings in the ranch complex appear to be modern (photographs 41-43). However, the so called blacksmith shop, (a cypress tree has fallen onto it) possibly dates back to the turn of the century (photographs 44-45). According to Pete Peterson there once were other sheds including a tack shed which has collapsed. Peterson also said that there used to be an old barn in the valley behind the ranch that was so large "you could drive a tractor around in it"; the old engine that rests in the valley is all that remains.

Scorpion Trail

As one leaves the Scorpion Ranch complex, there is a well defined road to Smugglers Cove. There are two notable examples of rock walls hand hewn by Italian and French immigrants in the late 19th century. Remarkably, no cement was used to bind the rocks together; they all fit row upon row and appear in a fine state of preservation (photographs 46-48).

Once at the top of the island the trail crosses a rolling plateau. Along the way one can spot several species of terrestrial birds, sheep and an occasional island fox. Along the way one can also note ten or so rock piles, evidence of field clearing done by Santa Cruz Island Company workers in the mid-19th century (photographs 49-51).

Smugglers Cove

Smugglers Cove is one of Santa Cruz Islands best anchorages. Recreational boaters often come ashore and walk up a narrow valley to the old Smugglers Cabin (see photographs #52). This structure is nearly identical to the Scorpion adobe ranch house except that it is abandoned, dilapidated and has been terribly vandalized as well as gutted (photograph #54). It is covered with grafetti, some of which is interesting historically. For example, in the kitchen one can read "Earl Oriygtos First airplane on Santa Cruz Island, April 18, 1928". The grafetti appears to date from 1927 and continues to the present (photograph 53).

There is a sundial with the date "1889" above the front door (photograph 55). One walks directly into a kitchen (about 11 feet wide by 16 feet deep, photograph 59). To the right is a dirt floor room about 8 feet wide and to the left is a room about 16 feet wide. The room on the left has a cloak rack on the south wall and a storage rack on the east wall; it has a cement floor (photograph 56-58). In the room to the right of the kitchen there is an exposed west wall which illustrates the construction techniques of the adobe. The first 4-1/2 feet of the wall is stone and mortar; brick then extends up to the roof (photograph 57). In this room there is also a chute from the second floor.

The second floor is divided into three rooms. Like the Scorpion ranch, one must climb stairs at the rear of the building to reach the second floor. These stairs are in badly deteriorated condition. The rooms are empty and measure 11 and 13 feet respectively. The larger southern room has a built in bookcase (photographs 60-61).

The area around the Smugglers cabin is strewn with historic era debris. A windmill also remains standing. There is a dense growth of Eucalyptus trees, thistle and knee-high grass.

Other Structures

Although the ranch complexes at Scorpions and Smugglers Coves are of some historic significance, the island was surveyed for evidence of fishing shacks at Hungrymans Gulch, Potatoe Harbor, Sandstone Point and Chinese Harbor as these are described in Eatons Book.6 There was no surface evidence of any of these camps (although an old oil well was spotted) which were occupied by various ethnic groups including Chinese, Japanese and Portugese fishermen (photographs 62-63).

Conclusion

In summary, both Scorpion and Smugglers ranch areas contain archeological sites of prehistoric and historic interest. At Scorpion several modified caves contain prehistoric and historic era debris; the main adobe ranch house, the bunk house and several sheds and shacks, because of their association with

the Santa Cruz Island Company Ranch should be preserved. Although there are several wood frame structures appearing to be of more recent vintage, a survey of all the structures by a qualified architectural historian is in order. Furnishings that remain in the Santa Cruz Island Company buildings all should be assessed for their historical and cultural significance. Although the ranch complex appears to be in a deteriorating condition there remains much original fabric and a historic scene worthy of preservation.

The stone rockwork along the proposed nature trail is an example of the fine European workmanship that the Santa Cruz Island Company immigrants brought with them to California in the 19th century. The stone roads and rock piles on the island plateau are of historic significance.

The Smugglers Ranch is rapidly deteriorating and has been heavily vandalized. However, it is not beyond repair; because the original fabric is still intact, it also is worthy of preservation. None of the fishing shacks described by Margaret Eaton remain standing, though archeologists no doubt could locate the campsites and glean important information about various ethnic groups who occupied the island.

1. George V. Russell and Associates, Gherini Development Plan
June 1965, pg 1-2.
2. Michael A. Glassow The Status of Archaeological Research on Eastern Santa Cruz Island, California. Social Process Research Institute, The University of California at Santa Barbara, 1983, (Report prepared for the National Park Service, Purchase Order #8000-0-0701.
3. Ibid p 5-7.
4. Margaret H. Eaton, Diary of a Sea Captain's Wife: Tales of Santa Cruz Island, McNally & Loftin, Santa Barbara 1980.
5. Glassow, pg 34-37.
6. Eaton, pg 51, 153-154, 167.